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APPROACHING DEMOCRACY

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PREFACE

Our deep commitment to undergraduate teaching led us to write this textbook; our abiding respect for democracy led us to our theme. In *Approaching Democracy* we join you in an exploration of the American experiment in self-government. As your guides we know that democracy has evolved over time in America and that the United States today has become a beacon for those seeking freedom and democratic government.

As teachers we have taken our title and theme from Vaclav Havel, a former dissident Czechoslovakian playwright once imprisoned by that country's Communist government and later elected its president. Addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress on February 21, 1990, Havel noted that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, millions of people from Eastern Europe were involved in a "historically irreversible process," beginning their quest for freedom and democracy. And it was the United States of America that represented the model, "the way to democracy and independence," for these newly freed peoples. But Havel put his own spin on the notion of American democracy as a model. "As long as people are people," Havel explained, "democracy, in the full sense of the word, will always be no more than an ideal. In this sense, you too are merely approaching democracy. But you have one great advantage: you have been approaching democracy uninterruptedly for more than 200 years, and your journey toward the horizon has never been disrupted by a totalitarian system."

This image of an America "approaching democracy" inspired the theme for our textbook. We write about American democracy as a work still in progress. Democracy as a system has become increasingly popular. The number of democracies worldwide, while just a handful of nations a century ago, increased from three or four dozen in the 1950s to 114 by the end of 1995. Clearly, we live in an age of democratic aspiration, and for many who seek to achieve democracy the United States represents a model of the democratic process. The United States has been making efforts to approach democracy for over two hundred years. In spite of its astonishing diversity and the consequent potential for hostility and violence, the United States has moved closer to the democratic ideal than nearly any other country, certainly more than any other country of comparable heterogeneity and size. But the process of approaching democracy is a continual one.

We believe in the linkage between democracy and education. Indeed, everything about democracy is educational; it's about ideas, history, and politics. From civil rights to civil liberties; from the powers of Congress to the *Contract With America*; from judicial review to presidential vetoes; from motor voter to campaign finance reform; from affirmative action to immigration; from national health care to balanced budgets; from talk radio to C-SPAN—democracy is educational because it involves discussion, be it speaking from wooden soap boxes or on the Internet. Ideas drive democracy!

We also believe the world in which we live has validated the democratic experiment in self-government. The triumph of democratic ideas in Eastern Europe was inspired by America's example of freedom and democracy. We are the laboratory for those who have broken from their totalitarian pasts and for those who dream of doing so. Nevertheless, democracy did not come easy to

Americans. Like Vaclav Havel, we believe that the United States is still approaching democracy. America's 200-year experience with government has been a lesson in the gradual expansion (and occasional restriction) of liberty, justice, and freedom. The chapters in this textbook examine the American approach to democracy, sorting out the ideals, studying the institutions, processes, and policies, and analyzing the dilemmas and paradoxes of freedom.

In this text we examine the elements and ideals of democracy in detail to help students understand how American government works. These democratic institutions and traditions—free elections, competitive political parties, a free press, interest groups, an independent judiciary, civilian control of the military, and a commitment among citizens to a set of democratic ideals—are indispensable for the preservation of democracy.

We also believe in the future. As teachers and parents we believe your generation can shape the future. In his memorable Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln observed that in the “new birth of freedom,” ours was “government of the people, by the people, for the people” and that it “shall not perish from the earth.” This is your greatest challenge as a citizen and student. People need not be a consequence of their past; *Approaching Democracy* may help shape your future. We can all work to safeguard democratic accomplishments by understanding our government and participating in it. By being informed American citizens, you can help American democracy continue to flourish.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEXT

Part I presents the foundations of American Government. Our theme is introduced in Chapter One, where we identify the goals and elements which can be used to evaluate America's approach to democracy. Throughout this book we ask that you think about how closely modern Americans have approached the ideals of true democracy. Political scientists are constantly trying to define and categorize democracy, using one or another set of objective indicators. While there is still healthy debate about the nature of these indicators, in Chapter One we introduce you to a few widely-accepted “elements of democracy.” These institutional elements will serve as markers to identify progress toward the democratic ideals discussed earlier. Only political systems that meet or at least approach those ideals can be considered democratic; by using these elements, you can discuss the strength and robustness of American democracy or any democracy.

In Chapter 2, “The Founding,” we offer a unique look over the decades of experimentation leading to the creation of the world's oldest continuous constitutional system. You will see that democracy took root early in America. Drawing on shared commitment to individual security and the rule of law, the frontier governments provided models on which the constitutional structure of American government was eventually built. To trace the development of American democracy from the early settlements to an independent United States, this chapter explores the ideas that inspired the American Revolution, including the impact of European political thinking on the founding and the struggle for independence from England.

From the Revolution sprang not just a declaration but a national identity rooted in the embodiment of the words “life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness." The Founders shared a commitment to classical democratic ideals. From this they built a foundation from which the country could approach democracy. In Chapter 3, "The Constitution," we look at the participants and their discussions in that remarkable gathering which produced the Constitution of the United States. We will see how, not unlike the discussions that raged over the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, the debates raged in the states over the ratification of the Constitution itself. Finally, we examine how the Constitution has changed over the last two hundred years and take a look at the debates over what the Constitution has come to mean to Americans. The Framers made it possible for the government they created to approach democracy. The Constitution was an imperfect document but a highly elastic one that over the years and in response to the times would become more democratic. The paradox of this foundation of American democracy, then, is that a Constitution written in secret by representatives of less than 5 percent of the population established processes that have led to the most openly democratic nation in the world.

Chapter 4 explores federalism and the relationship between the power of the national government and the needs and powers of the state governments. Federalism is one of America's unique contributions to democratic theory and republican government. Only by understanding how the system works can you come to understand how it has helped the United States to approach democracy. But, as you will learn, the precise nature of this governmental relationship has been a matter for ongoing debate, most recently during the 1995 attempts to implement the terms of the Republican *Contract With America*.

Part II explores the institutions of American Democracy. Chapter 5 on Congress proved to be one of most challenging to write because of the historic changes resulting from the 1994 election and the actions of the 104th Republican Congress involving the *Contract With America*.

Although most members of Congress are sincere, honest, hard-working, and dedicated to doing a difficult job under trying circumstances, the institution in which they serve continually faces criticism. When Congress works in a deliberative fashion, as it was meant to, it is labeled as obstructionist; when it approves most of the president's programs, it is accused of being a rubber stamp. And if it takes strong actions on its own, it is accused of overreaching its powers. Clearly the truth lies somewhere among these extremes. Above all, we need to recognize that Congress was designed as a consensus-building institution in a nation where public preferences are frequently contradictory.

Chapter 6 on the presidency illustrates one of the greatest challenges facing the Constitutional Framers—a strong leader was needed to energize the government but this powerful president can simultaneously represent a significant threat to the democratic nature of the government. The great paradox of the presidency is that nowhere in America is there an office that unites power as well as purpose to help Americans approach their democratic potential, yet also poses the most serious potential threats to democracy.

The Supreme Court becomes the focus of Chapter 7. The most procedurally undemocratic institution in the system (its members are unelected, serve unlimited terms, and work in secrecy) actually increases the democratic nature of human rights and balances the powers of the other institutions through judicial review. In this chapter we examine the developing powers of the Su-

preme Court, the organization of the American court system, judicial appointments, and how cases are appealed to and then decided by the Supreme Court. We also look at how judges arrive at decisions and, perhaps most important, how those decisions affect both public policy and democracy.

Over the years, the willingness of the Supreme Court and the lower federal courts to use the full extent of their power has varied based on the nature of the legal issues, the number of cases heard, the political situation, and who the justices are. In recent years, the federal courts have been more willing to defer to Congress and the states. Will this continue, or will the courts seek out a new direction and role? The actions of the judiciary in America's democracy have powerful implications for both government and individual rights.

Finally, Chapter 8 examines the Bureaucracy. Part of the suspicion Americans feel about their bureaucracy comes from the realization that most government agencies function, most of the time, with little or no restraint from the American people. Indeed, the bureaucracy has been called the "fourth branch of the government," as powerful as Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court, but operating without the regular elections that keep at least the first two institutions responsive to public opinion.

Despite their problems, bureaucracies are necessary and have come to characterize modern industrialized societies. Large-scale bureaucratic organizations allow for high levels of productivity and the coordination of government programs such as road building, air traffic control, environmental management, the postal system, and telecommunications. Nevertheless, bureaucracies can pose serious problems in terms of accountability and power.

Part III focuses on the processes of American Government and Democracy. Chapter 9 on public opinion illustrates the means by which the desires, needs, and demands of the American people are translated into action by their government. Public opinion is the keystone of democracy. No government can claim to be the legitimate voice of a people, unless public opinion plays an integral role in the choice of political leaders and the development of public policy. Thus, the gathering of information about public opinion becomes a vital task for a democracy.

Chapter 10 studies the political parties that lie at the heart of democracy. They represent the crucial link between what citizens want and what government does. That's why parties are continually changing, adapting, and adjusting to the new popular forces of their time. They want to stay in touch with the voters—those people from whom they derive support and power—so that they can gain control of government and the policymaking process.

In Chapter 11 we study participation, voting, and elections. For the framers, republican government represented a balance between popular input and deliberative statesmanship. Most government officials would be elected and ultimately accountable to the people. On the other hand, they would be somewhat removed from the immediate expression of popular will. Hence, they could use discretion and deliberation in making public policy. Since the framer's day, the spirit of democratic equality has gained ascendancy over the view that officials should be removed from the immediate winds of public opinion. This development has not been a revolutionary one. It has evolved, often with painful slowness, over the entire course of American history, so that today it is fully ingrained in American political life. And the American people have evolved with it.

It is true that even today millions of Americans forego their democratic rights by failing to take advantage of the many opportunities to participate in the politics of their free society. Nevertheless, it is also true that tens of millions of Americans, regardless of class, race, gender, or ethnic background, do express their political viewpoints and engage in civic activity to protect their interests. The American system presents no legal barriers to full participation by all; it also goes a long way toward maintaining the economic and psychological barriers that still hamper involvement for some. The people's relatively unrestricted ability to participate in political life stands as the best possible evidence that Americans have made enormous progress toward the ideal of a truly democratic society.

In Chapter 12 we examine the subject of interest groups and discover one of the paradoxes of democracy. Interest groups provide a vital link between citizens and public officials. They convey substantive information and public sentiment to policymakers and they provide knowledge about government programs to citizens and assist them in gaining access to these programs. Interest groups even provide the inspiration necessary to stimulate citizen involvement in politics. It remains true that the most powerful, most influential, and most resourceful interests have advantages. Politics is rarely played on a level field. Business and corporate interests far outweigh public interest groups in most power struggles. And, small but powerful interests often gain their ends from government, seemingly at the expense of the public good.

Chapter 13 examines the media, especially the evolution of media technologies and electronic telecommunications as well as the media's coverage of politics. We also explore the process by which members of the media determine what is newsworthy and the ways in which government officials manipulate the media. Throughout the chapter it will be evident that freedom of the press and other media is of fundamental importance in approaching democracy.

Part IV provides a detailed analysis of various issues of civil rights and liberties in American Democracy. Civil liberties are the individual rights that are guaranteed to every citizen by the Bill of Rights and the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. They include the most fundamental rights of Americans, such as freedom of speech and religion. Civil rights are concerned with protection of citizens against discrimination because of characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, or disability; they are derived largely from the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Chapter 14 examines the subject of civil liberties, illustrating both how America has approached democracy by extending the Bill of Rights to the states and through the process of Supreme Court interpretations of these rights. Chapter 15 then addresses civil rights and political equality, where we explore how the rights of African Americans, Women, Hispanics, and Native Americans have developed over the years, including groups of people in the political process who were not a part of the Framers' political era.

Part V provides three chapters which address the policymaking process and its consequences. Chapter 16 focuses on public policies of regulation and social welfare. Social welfare policymaking, like regulatory policymaking, has a long political history and faces tremendous challenges. There is no easy formula for providing equal resources for all, a fair chance for all to succeed, and the opportunity for all to flourish financially and personally. How well national

policymakers respond to these challenges—and how democratic the policies are—will remain crucial questions as American government continues the process of approaching democracy. Chapter 17 examines federal economic policies and the philosophies which guide these policies. Politicians know very well that they will be rewarded for good economic times and punished for economic downturns. Politics and economics are thus fundamentally intertwined, and it is this linkage, with all of its different variations, that provides the economic signposts on the road that we follow in our continuing approach to democracy. Decisions about taxes, the budget, currency, and government intervention into the economy pose fundamental questions about the fairness of democracy. How can we talk about democracy not merely in political but in economic terms? How fair is our tax system? How democratic is the process through which economic policy is created?

Finally, Chapter 18 addresses the evolution of U.S. foreign policy and the role of the United States in the post-Cold War world, with special attention given to President Clinton's first two years in office. There are really two related challenges for U.S. foreign policy today. First, the U.S. must try to determine a foreign policy course in a complicated and changing international environment, one that involves an appropriate balance of commitments and resources. Second, it must do so within the democratic limits established in the Constitution. Ultimately then, the paramount challenge is how to balance the interests of security and the requirements of democracy.

FEATURES OF THE TEXT

We hope that readers will take advantage of the unique features which are designed to illustrate our theme, approaching democracy. Each chapter begins with a full length chapter opening case study that integrates our theme and lays the groundwork for the material that follows. We have taken special care in selecting cases that provide anchors for the material covered in each chapter.

A series of other boxed features appearing periodically throughout the book will highlight different aspects of the book's theme. The **Global View** boxes examine politics from a comparative perspective by looking at the approach to democracy around the world. Here we compare the different features of the American political system to those of other countries around the world. The **Struggle for Equality** boxes examine the struggle that many groups have endured, and the people who have served as torches on the road to democracy leading them in their effort to be included in the American democratic experiment. The **Cutting Edge** boxes will show how the constantly changing technological and media advances have changed the process of American government as well as student and citizen involvement. At any time you may visit our own **Approaching Democracy Home Page on the WorldWideWeb**. Here you will be brought up to date on the week's current events with a special narrative linking these events to our theme and then be directed to a myriad of internet resources on American government. You may also leave us a message or even a question about the book or an assignment. We promise to "reply." You may also utilize our multimedia CD-ROM which includes an interactive study guide, videos, simulations, and text. Despite all of these technological changes, you will be surprised at how many of the issues

and the balancing of interests remains the same as in the era when the Framers wrote by the light of a candle. In the ***Thinking Critically*** boxes, we seek to develop the critical analysis powers of students by presenting a series of key incidents or decisions in history and placing you in the position of a decision-maker charged with directing the government at *that* point. A series of other ***General Interest*** boxes discuss numerous valuable political issues that have occupied the country's attention in its present location on the road to democracy. Here we also learn about some of the most intriguing people on the American political scene.

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A GUIDE TO CIVIC LITERACY BY JAMES CHESNEY AND OTTO FEINSTEIN, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY This brief booklet provides ideas and suggestions for students to get involved in politics. It includes nine political activities on topics such as agenda building; coalition building; registering, educating, and mobilizing voters; and increasing accountability.



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Berman has been featured on Bill Moyers's public television series, "Moyers: The Public Mind," and the national Public Broadcasting System documentary, "LBJ." His class on the American presidency is cited in Lisa Birnbach's *New and Improved College Guide* as the most recommended class for undergraduates at U.C., Davis. He has just completed a series of live satellite interactive television interviews for his American government class, including an interview with Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich.



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Murphy has received numerous teaching awards for his courses in Constitutional Law and American Politics. He has been a finalist in the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education's national "Professor of the Year" competition, and was cited as one of Penn State's "Best Professors" in Lisa Birnbach's *New and Improved College Guide*.

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